



## Influence of Psycho-Demographic Factors on Fear of Crime Among Multi-Nationals in Lagos, Nigeria

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 January, 2011

Received in revised form 20 May, 2011

Accepted 2 July, 2011

### ABSTRACT

The influence of personality variables, perceived insecurity, perceived police effectiveness and demographic factors as they relate to fear of crime (FOC) in convenience samples of multi-nationals (N=202) and Nigerian nationals living in Lagos, Nigeria, was investigated. Nigerians reported the highest level of FOC while Americans reported the lowest level of FOC. Results indicate the combined influence of psychological factors and an independent effect of perceived security. Demographic factors jointly predicted FOC and gender. Perceived police effectiveness and perceptions of security were positively correlated. Significant differences related to FOC were found among all national groups. These findings suggest that individuals, and governments at all levels should be aware that FOC varies among foreigners, and that FOC is predicted by perceived security and gender. Psychological and social relief efforts to meet specific socio-cultural and geographical differences in the country may contribute to a reduction in FOC in Nigeria.

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Fear of crime (FOC) is a social and psychological construct reflecting how vulnerable a person feels in anticipation of victimization. It is essentially an emotional reaction characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety produced by the threat of physical harm elicited by perceived cues in the environment that relate to some aspect of crime (Church Council, 1995). Fear of being a victim of crime can affect social relationships, economic activities, and confidence in vital institutions of society (Alemika, 2009).

Crime is an inherent element of any society (Mukoro, 1991; Mawby & Walklate, 1994). Urban areas contend with a higher incidence of crime, and the nature of the crimes committed is becoming

increasingly more violent (Pino, 2001). Daily reports of crime in Nigeria indicate that since January 2009, more than 111 foreign nationals have been kidnapped in Nigeria, including 21 in 2010. Six foreign nationals were killed in connection with these abductions; two U.S. citizens were killed in separate abduction attempts in Port Harcourt in April 2010. In September 2010, over 150 members of the *Boko Haram* extremist religious sect escaped from prison in Northeast Bauchi and Borno States, some of whom are now believed to be participating in Boko Haram attacks in other parts of the country. On October 1, 2010, two car bombs detonated near Eagle Square in downtown Abuja during Independence Day celebrations, killing 10 people and wounding many others. The *Movement to Emancipate the Niger Delta* (MEND) claimed responsibility for these attacks. On October 15, 2010, a MEND spokesperson threatened further bombings in Abuja (U.S. Department of State, 2010). On October 19, 2010 the U.S. Department of State, therefore, warned U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to Nigeria. It also advised U.S. citizens to avoid all but essential travel to many South East and

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North East Nigerian states because of the risk of kidnapping, robbery, and other armed attacks in these areas (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Despite this dire outlook, Zedner (1997) argues that fear of crime far outweighs the chances of being a victim of crime in Nigeria, in a manner that suggests FOC itself is the problem and that worrying about crime is irrational. The 1995 British Crime Survey (BCS) demonstrated that in England and Wales, nearly a third of respondents believed they were "certain," "very likely," or "fairly likely" to be burgled within the next year, but crime statistics reveal that only 6% of households were burgled in 1995 (Croall, 1998). Similar findings were obtained in Canada, (Church Council on Justice and Corrections, 1997).

Nigerian-based research (Alemika, 2009) found that most respondents have a "very high," degree of fear; overall, 38.9% were "very fearful," 32.7% were "fearful," and 15% were "a little fearful." Survey results also reveal geographical variation in FOC within Nigeria: respondents in the Nigerian states of *Gombe*, the *Federal Capital Territory*, *Plateau*, *Ebonyi*, *Ondo*, and *Sokoto* were the most fearful, while those living in *Anambra*, *Ogun*, and *Lagos* were the least fearful.

Research findings indicate that fear levels vary according to ethnic background but no consistent association has yet been demonstrated. In general, however, "Whites" express the lowest levels of fear in relation to almost every crime. The 1994 British Crime Survey found that for harassment, burglary, rape, and mugging, the "Asians" expressed the most fear, "Blacks" the next highest fear levels, and "Whites," the least fear (Hough, 1995). Contrary to this, some studies report "Black" respondents were the most fearful (Evans, 1995; Silverman & Kennedy, 1983).

These early crime surveys were criticized on the grounds that these fears were not relevant to the experiences of the respondents (Croall, 1998). Also, the levels of worry among women concerning rape appears to be far more rational when the extent of unreported rape is taken into account (Zedner, 1997). The research literature establishes a clear relationship between modernization and increasing levels of criminality (Chermak, 2007). Further, the Person-Environment Fit theory proposed by French (1974), emphasizes that environmental events are not universal stressors; rather, their impact varies depending on individual perception. These perceptions may hinge on appraisals of the demands being made by the environment and individual appraisals of capability and motivation to meet these demands. Therefore, foreign nationals might perceive themselves to be as being secure in Nigeria on the

basis of their perceived *fit* with their environment; that is, how safe or to what degree they enjoy living in Nigeria.

Unfamiliar surroundings have the potential to engender fear. Similarly, an emotional response to danger tends to increase with age and understanding, such that adults are more likely to sense and understand danger in the environment than children (Agbola, 1997). Also, those most at risk of assault, such as young men, express far less concern about fear of crime than those least at risk (Zedner, 1997). In contrast, older people and women express higher levels of worry about walking in the streets at night (Brammer, 2006). However, elderly people are rarely the specific targets of most crimes; their level of fear far exceeds their risk of victimization (Bernard, 2006; Brammer, 2006).

Other factors related to FOC should be considered (Bernard, 2006; Altheide & Snow, 2005). For example, a poorly equipped and motivated police force is likely to be ineffective, yet this manifests itself as *unwillingness* to protect citizens (Hall, Crichton, & Jefferson, 2007). Perceived police ineffectiveness creates a feeling of mistrust of the police and also leads to perceived insecurity. Burglary and robbery usually involve a stranger, weapons, physical assaults, and the loss of valuables (Skogan & Klecka, 1997; Barak, 2006). Because these crimes are invasions of self, cause terror, and involve substantial loss, they generate some degree of fear. A substantial body of research also attests to the relevance of demographic and personal characteristics on FOC (Scarborough, Like-Haislip, Novak, Lucas, & Alarid, 2002; Toseland, 1982).

The high incidence of crime in Nigeria impacts foreign investment in this resource-poor country. Foreign nationals and local employees in multinational companies constantly live in fear of becoming victims of crime. Despite this economic impact and the role of FOC in motivating effective responses, by various law enforcement and other government agencies, there has been little or no research on the psychological response to perceived or actual crime, in particular among foreign nationals. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the role of personality variables, perceived police effectiveness, perceived security, and demographic factors of sex, age, and ethnic background in predicting fear of crime among foreign nationals residing in Lagos, Nigeria. Of specific interest in this study are: (a) how the variables of personality, perceived security and police effectiveness, and demographic factors, independently and jointly, predict FOC; (b) the relationship between perceived security, perceived police effectiveness and FOC; and (c) the relationship between ethnicity and FOC.

## Method

### Participants

A convenience sample of 285 participants (86 women and 116 men; mean age = 35 years) was drawn from willing employees of selected multinational companies located in Lagos, Nigeria. A survey response rate of 71% ( $N = 202$ ) was achieved. Permission for data collection was obtained from the management of the selected organizations consistent with informed consent and the strict ethical standards required by the companies concerned.

### Instruments

A 96-item, self-report questionnaire with items grouped in five sections was used: (a) demographic data (7 items); (b) the *Big Five Personality Inventory* (John, 1991) (5 items); (c) fear of crime (FOC) (4 items [developed by van Geert, 2004]); (d) a 21-item scale measuring perception of police effectiveness in crime prevention and control; and (e) a perceived insecurity scale (20 items).

### Design and Procedures

A pilot study was conducted in Ibadan, Nigeria, to elicit the opinions of employees of multi-national companies in Nigeria about FOC and their perception of the effectiveness of the police in preventing and controlling crime. Based on the information obtained, the research instruments were designed. The survey adopted a cross-sectional design. The independent variables were psychological and demographic factors, while the dependent variable was fear of crime (FOC). Cross-nationality comparisons were also conducted.

## Results

The convenience sample had a disproportionate sex balance, but was equally distributed across four ethnic groups, although *Americans* were relatively under-represented. The majority was Christian, and approximately two thirds of the sample reported that the experience of crime in Nigeria was common (Table 1).

Table 2 shows that Nigerian-Africans reported the highest level of FOC ( $M = 14.5$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ) and Americans the least, but this finding may be attributed to the discrepant ethnic group sample sizes ( $M = 12.7$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ). Participants with the highest

Table 1

### Demographic profile of sample group

	Male		Female	
Sex	116 (57.4%)		86 (42.6%)	
Ethnic Group	African	34 (16.8%)	European	24 (11.9%)
	Asian	34 (16.8%)	American	13 (6.4%)
Religion	Christian	27 (13.4%)	Traditional Religions	6 (3%)
	Muslim	6 (3%)	Other	2 (1%)
Incidence of Crime	Common		Uncommon	
	125 (61.9%)		77 (38.1%)	

Table 2

### Ethnicity and fear of crime

Ethnicity	N	FOC (Mean)	SD	Rank
Nigerian-African	30	14.5	1.98	1
Non Nigerian-African	101	14.2	2.90	2
Asian	34	12.9	2.81	4
European	24	14.1	2.31	3
American	13	12.7	2.69	5
Total Nigerian	30	14.5	1.98	
Total non-Nigerian	172	13.8	2.83	
Total	202	13.9	2.73	

levels of perceived security reported the highest level of FOC ( $M = 14.5$ ), followed by participants who reported a high incidence of crime ( $M = 14.4$ ) (Table 3).

Participants reporting "Other," religious affiliation had the lowest level of FOC ( $M = 09.4$ ), followed by younger participants ( $M = 10.2$ ).

A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the frequency of levels of fear among various races. While participants exhibited equal levels of fear, significant differences in levels of fear of crime were obtained.

their coping strategies, thereby removing the basis for any form of FOC. Even in cases in which the public policing system is unreliable, persons with relatively more resources in Nigeria have the capacity to initiate alternative security measures consistent with the degree or possibility of anticipated risk of assault.

Further, most foreign nationals in this study, particularly Americans and Europeans expatriates, are employed in relatively lucrative occupations, such as the oil, gas, and information technology industries. As a result, these foreigners in Nigeria have higher wages, status, and living standards relative to non-Nigerian-Africans. Consequently, this group can direct resources to obtain the desired level of security, in addition to locally implemented anti-crime measures. Another explanation for the lower levels of fear of crime reported by foreigners compared to non-Nigerian-Africans may be that foreigners are more responsive, better trained, more professional, and enjoy more visible policing. These factors in effect reduce incivility and crime opportunities (through environmental re-design) in the expatriate life context, leading to an appraisal among foreign nationals of increased personal security. This interpretation is in agreement with the Person-Environment fit theory (French, 1973). However, why Americans, Europeans, Asians and non-Nigerian Africans reported lower levels of FOC compared to Nigerian-Africans is still unresolved.

Perceived police effectiveness and personality variables did not predict FOC in this study. This finding means that an individual's impression of the effectiveness of the police does not significantly predict FOC. This finding is contrary to earlier findings of Hall, Crichton, and Jefferson (2007) that an individual's impression of the effectiveness of the police often determines FOC. The findings in the present study may be based on the contention that crime is naturally an unpleasant stimulus, and would readily engender a fear response, irrespective of whether or not the police system is perceived to be competent. A fear response could be more readily explained by the frequency, diversity, and heinous nature of crime in unsafe and poverty-endemic societies such as Nigeria.

As posited by Alemika, (2009), the primary purpose of the police in any society is to protect law-abiding citizens from crime and to enforce laws. No society can develop without an efficient law enforcement system. Although Nigeria has a police force of more than 370,000 officers, the public perception of the police is generally negative: that is, corrupt, brutal, and unprofessional. A very high degree of fear of crime results from people's loss of confidence in the ability of the security agencies to protect them. People may fall victim to attacks from

both security agencies and criminals; often it is difficult to distinguish between the two groups of offenders. There are also raids in which people are arrested on the streets or in their homes, usually after a crime, and are mistakenly accused of armed robbery. Also, people conducting business with banks are often at the mercy of criminals. Official inaction to redress this type of crime has also generated a lot of insecurity. Earlier, it was observed that a poorly equipped and motivated police force would most likely be ineffective (Barak, 2006; Hall, Crichton, & Jefferson, 2007). This contention manifests itself in unwillingness on behalf of police officers to risk their lives for the citizenry and a lackadaisical attitude demonstrated during investigations. Such as state of affairs might have contributed to the higher level of FOC reported by the Nigerian participants in this study, and as observed by Alemika (2009).

Further, the present study established a significant positive relationship between perceived police effectiveness and perceived security. This finding suggests that an increase in an individual's perception of police effectiveness is associated with an increase in a person's level of perceived security, a notion that is in agreement with the Person-Environment fit theory proposed by French (1973).

Finally, it was found that age, gender, and ethnicity significantly predict FOC. In combination, they contribute 4% of total variance, but sex contributed 15%. The significant influence of gender in predicting FOC, as well as the failure of age in predicting FOC, partly supports the findings of Brammer, (2006) who found that older people and women show much greater levels of worry about the possibility of walking in the streets at night. In the Nigeria context, both elders and the young will not venture out at night because the streets in most cities are dark due to predictable and pervasive electricity supply outages.

## Conclusions

The influence of the psychological factors of personality, perceived insecurity and perceived police effectiveness, and the demographic factors of age, sex, and ethnicity as they relate to FOC among multi-nationals was investigated. An association was found between the combined influence of psychological factors and the independent influence of perceived security on FOC. Personality and perceived police effectiveness did not predict FOC. Demographic factors jointly predicted FOC, as did a person's sex, but race and age did not. A significant, positive relationship was found between perceived police effectiveness and perceived security. A significant

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difference was found between various national groups in terms of levels of FOC reported; Nigerians reported the highest level and Americans reported the lowest level.

It is recommended that individuals, NGOs, and all levels of governments in Nigeria be aware that FOC varies among foreigners and that FOC is predicted by perceived security and gender. These factors should be considered in determining FOC, especially for employees of multi-national companies working in Nigeria. In addition, the joint influence of other psychological and demographic factors considered in this study should be considered when formulating policies and planning intervention programmes.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Twenty-five items were generated through two focus group discussions, literature review and suggestion of experts. An initial content analysis by experts led to deletion of 4 items. After minor wording changes, each of the remaining 21 items were placed on a five-point response scale with responses ranging between strongly agree to strongly disagree. Psychometric analysis of the items included item analysis, confirmatory principal component analysis (PCA), and internal consistency analysis using Cronbach alpha. Correlation ranged between .30 and .63. The 21 items were subjected to PCA with iterations, mean substitution of missing values, varimax rotation, and Kaiser normalisation. Application of Kaiser's criterion of using all un-rotated factors with Eigen values > 30 resulted in 4 components accounting for 28.7% variance. The rotated component matrix was parsimonious and interpretable.